

NSC BRIEFING

3 December 1958

MODIFIED ESTIMATE OF SOVIET ICBM CAPABILITIES

I. Since the completion of our last major estimate on Soviet guided missiles (on which I briefed the Council on 27 August 1958), the intelligence community has intensively re-examined the Soviet ICBM program.

A. Participating in this review, in addition to individual intelligence agencies with competence in this field, were the Guided Missile Intelligence Committee of the United States Intelligence Board and a special ad hoc panel of consultants from other areas of government and from industry, whom I called together for this purpose after consulting with Mr. Killian.

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III. Our review of all available evidence has just been completed, and the United States Intelligence Board has concurred without dissent to a somewhat modified estimate of Soviet ICBM capabilities.

A. We continue to believe that the USSR will probably achieve a first operational capability with ten prototype ICBMs at some time during 1959. Considering the Soviets' progress in the whole field of missiles and the capabilities demonstrated in their ICBM, earth satellite, and other ballistic missile launching, we have not changed this estimate

B. While it remains possible that a limited capability with comparatively unproven ICBMs has been (or will still be) established in 1968, we now believe this to be extremely unlikely.

C. We have also re-examined the complex tasks the USSR would have to accomplish to achieve sizable operational capabilities with ICBMs, and have changed from 1961 to 1962 the more probable year at which we estimate that the USSR could achieve an operational capability with 500 ICBMs. However, we believe that with overriding priority and exceptional success in their test and production program, such a capability might be achieved as early as 1961.

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